

## Contents:

Focus on Recruitment	
Commission Report	2
Application Material	
Submission Checklists	
UW & MSL PEEL	2
Reference Librarianship at MSU Bozeman	3
During Black History Month	
Thomson Gale is providing Montana libraries with access to Biography Resource Center: African Americans	3
The Passionate Librarian	4
The Essence of Librarianship	4-5
Why Be a Montana Librarian?	5
Words of Advice from a Current PEEL Scholar	6
Getting the Most Out of Your MLIS Experience	7-8



## Date — Event

- February 8, 2006 – MSL Commission Meeting in Helena
- February 24-25, 2006 – OFF-LINE Retreat at Carroll College in Helena
- March 23, 2006 – NRIS Seminar: Geospatial OneStop
- April 12, 2006 – MSL Commission Meeting in Helena
- April 30-May 2, 2006 – National Library Legislative Day, Washington D.C.

For more details:

<http://msl.mt.gov/calendar.html>

## Recruiting the Next Generation

This issue of "Big Sky Libraries" focuses on an important issue facing libraries all over the country: retention and recruitment of librarians.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) anticipates the loss of 58% of the current pool of professional librarians by 2019. While that statistic is alarming, IMLS has launched an innovative effort to combat it. The "Recruiting and Educating Librarians for the 21st Century" grant program provides money for states across the nation to do just as the title suggests: recruit and educate the next generation of librarians.

Montana has been fortunate to be selected to receive its second grant under this program. The three-year grant, "Professional Education and Employment for Librarians II" or PEEL II, will fund a statewide promotion/recruitment campaign designed to attract Montana residents to the library profession, with an emphasis on recruiting more Native American librarians. Ten Montana residents will receive \$25,000 scholarships to attend graduate library school, and will be required to work in a Montana library for a minimum of two years following the program. Stipends will also be awarded to help libraries bring these new graduates into their communities.

The award acknowledges what many of us already know: Montana needs Masters of Library and Information

Science educated librarians. Many of Montana's librarians are approaching retirement age and dream of having more time with family and hobbies. We need younger college graduates to pursue the library science master's degree so they can become a professional librarian and help us replace Montana's retiring librarians!



Darlene Staffeldt.

But to effectively recruit and educate the next generation of librarians, we need those that are working as the "ultimate search engines" to help us. Do you have staff members who may be interested in pursuing a master's degree and committing to librarianship as a profession? Are there patrons that may seem particularly enamored of the library profession that may be interested in applying for our scholarship? And for those of you that work at academic libraries, are you sharing with students the benefits of being a librarian?

I hope that you use this issue as a recruitment tool. Librarians from around the state have generously shared their experiences of working in libraries, serving the public, and why being a librarian is one of the best jobs in the country. For more information on our recruitment campaign, please be sure to visit: <http://msl.mt.gov/greatcareer>.

## Learn more about the University of Washington's Distance MLIS!

Join a live Web chat on

Wednesday, February 8, 2006, from 6 - 7 p.m.

Visit <http://www.ischool.washington.edu/mlis>

Please RSVP to [dmlis@ischool.washington.edu](mailto:dmlis@ischool.washington.edu)

and include your full name, where you are from, and which web chat you will be attending.

# Commission Report

By Caroline Bitz

When asked to serve on the advisory committee for the State Library's recruitment campaign "Professional Education and Employment for Librarians" (PEEL), I jumped at the chance. It seemed a hugely important task to me – to help define a program that would select recipients of a scholarship designed to recruit the next generation of Montana librarians. What an opportunity!

PEEL has proven to be an innovative program, and I think serves as a viable solution to one of Montana's problems. In this world of information overload, librarians help the public to find and evaluate the best sources of information – whatever their problem is. And, in addition to teaching others how to find, use, and evaluate information, librarians have also become invaluable freedom fighters, literacy proponents, and education advocates – noble causes all. While librarians really are the "ultimate search engine," they wear a hundred other hats as well.

That may be particularly true in Montana, a place where libraries are often short-staffed and librarians may act as library director, circulation assistant, information desk manager, book reviewer and purchaser, and story hour leader – all in the same day! For people who love doing something different each day, who enjoy helping people,

and who like to be active participants in their communities, the library profession just may be the answer.

And, as if we needed confirmation, *U.S. News & World Report* just named librarianship as one of the top careers to have in 2006. Librarianship is an "underrated career" according to the magazine, with expected growth in the years to come in libraries and in non-traditional library settings like corporations and non-profits. Librarians will be in demand as the amount of information mounts and the need to find and evaluate information grows.

For those of you that already work in libraries, you can personally attest to the value of the work you do. And, I hope that you will work as librarian recruiters, becoming evangelists for the profession and encouraging people to consider careers in librarianship and to apply to receive their masters in information and library sciences, and to apply for a scholarship to pay for their graduate studies. Again, PEEL is creating wonderful opportunities – for those of us who serve on the advisory committee, for future Montana librarians, and for our libraries! ☺



Caroline Bitz

## Application Materials Submission Checklists



### University of Washington

1. Materials to be mailed to Information School - (Distance) Master of Library & Information Science:

INFORMATION SCHOOL  
370 MARY GATES HALL  
BOX 352840  
SEATTLE WA 98195-2840

- ☛ Copy of Graduate School Application, signed and dated
- ☛ Departmental Application (submitted online)
- ☛ Personal Statement (submitted online)
- ☛ 3 recommendations (on Information School MLIS recommendation forms)
- ☛ Official copy of GRE General Test scores
- ☛ One copy of official transcripts from degree granting institutions

2. Materials to be mailed to Graduate Admissions: You do not need to mail any materials to Graduate Admissions if you complete the application and pay the fee on-line by credit card, unless you have earned a bachelor's or higher degree from an institution outside the United States or its territories. If so, then you must print a copy of the application and send it, together with an official copy of the transcript and degree statement, to the following address:

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON  
OFFICE OF GRADUATE ADMISSIONS  
BOX 84808  
ROOM 301 LOEW HALL  
SEATTLE WASHINGTON 98124-6108



### PEEL Scholarship Program

NOTE: You are responsible for sending application materials to the University of Washington's Graduate School and Information School as required by UW. The University alone will make the decision about applicants' acceptance into the UW iSchool. Do not send your University of Washington application materials to the Montana Library Scholarship Program.

The following materials are required to apply for a scholarship award:

I. SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION FORM (see INSERT LINK)

II. CURRENT RESUME

Resume should include educational background, work experience, and references

III. STATEMENT ON MONTANA LIBRARY CAREER

Prepare a statement no longer than 2 pages (double-spaced, 12-point type, 1-inch margins) that addresses the following:

What you will bring to librarianship in Montana

How you see yourself fitting into the Montana library community

IV. SIGNED SCHOLARSHIP AGREEMENT

(for more information visit: <http://msl.mt.gov/greatcareer>)

V. SEND APPLICATION MATERIALS TO:

MONTANA LIBRARY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM  
MONTANA STATE LIBRARY  
PO BOX 201800  
HELENA, MT 59620-1800

**Materials Must Be Postmarked By March 15, 2006**

# Reference Librarianship at MSU Bozeman

by Richard Wojtowicz, Reference Librarian/Assistant Professor, MSU Libraries-Bozeman

I serve the Montana community as a reference librarian and assistant professor at MSU Libraries-Bozeman. Here at MSU, librarians are faculty, with the attending privileges and responsibilities. Thus, we do the typical work of a reference librarian, but in addition we must meet the expectations toward retention, tenure, and promotion outlined in the University and Library Faculty Handbooks. A "typical day" at Renne Library simply does not exist. Every day offers different opportunities and challenges.

With all of this in mind, I describe an "average day," woven from the loose threads of a series of days. A reference desk shift, typically 10 to 15 hours per week, entails dealing mostly with students, but also with staff, faculty, and the general public. Questions range from directional (Where's the restroom?) to course-related (Where do I get reserve readings? How do I find this article/book?) to faculty (What databases are most valuable for my research/teaching? How do I obtain a copy of this article?) to staff (How do I find the salary of this state employee?) to general and specific questions from the public (What is the email/postal address of the U.S. United Nations representative? How do I find a book in this library?). I also cover email reference, which offers assistance with short answer questions, when assigned librarians are at conferences, on vacation, or otherwise unavailable.

A Research Assistance Program (RAP) session, set up by appointment between the patron and a reference librarian, may last an hour or longer, depending on the needs of the patron. During a RAP session, I, having prepared for the session in advance, assist the patron to formulate search strategies, select the best resources – print and electronic, teach the use of print sources and databases to find information and articles, and provide access to expertise in a field as required. Sometimes I meet with a patron who has not quite expressed his/her information needs clearly, despite efforts at an initial reference interview via email, telephone, or in person. That presents an opportunity to draw on my overall problem solving/research skills. Most of the time I am successful, but in other situations I must schedule a follow-up appointment to allow time for further research.

I cannot recall any patrons leaving without some sort of assistance that was on target, even when the overall information need required further effort.

In the book review area, the reference librarian shares collection development responsibilities with the collection development librarian. I review book shipments, normally received once per week, and recommend items to keep and those to reject, offering well-considered reasons in writing for more controversial items. I also examine approval slips in each of the LC broad subject areas and mark them yes or no for further consideration based on our collection and the needs of our various academic and research programs. Additionally, I suggest books for purchase which I may have encountered in catalogs, reviews, conversations, and elsewhere. We find collection development at MSU less onerous since we have a Dean who has always ensured an excellent development budget over his lengthy tenure.

MSU reference librarians also face the prospect of troubleshooting computers, software, databases, printing issues, finding an item that is supposedly on the shelf, and a long list of other unforeseen problems. Computer-related problems range from simple ones I usually can solve myself to more complicated supernaturally-inspired gremlins, requiring the intervention of patron saints or a more experienced soul from library systems.

During other time away from the reference desk, I address the other responsibilities as an MSU reference librarian. Much of my time is spent researching various topics for prospective publication. This takes much more of my time than the actual writing and includes items for journals, other periodicals, professional presentations, and books. We also participate in frequent meetings at the reference team, library, university, service, and professional organization levels. Frequent independent review of our electronic and print resources maintains a high level of proficiency in the use of our information toolkits.

The greatest non-monetary reward of reference librarianship is knowing that you have successfully helped people to find answers to their questions through the library and its resources and left patrons happy with the services you have provided. I am also thankful to work with good people and library leadership. ☺

## During Black History Month in February



*Biography Resource Center: African Americans* includes nearly 30,000 biographies on more than 24,000 notable African Americans who have had an impact on society and are frequently researched. Drawn from the Biography Resource Center, the database includes 60 volumes of six respected Thomson Gale reference sources such as Contemporary Black Biography, Notable Black American Women, Who's Who Among African Americans, and other titles. *Biography Resource Center: African Americans* also includes more than 42,000 full-text articles from nearly 300 magazines, as well as nearly 2,000 images.

Designed to provide easy access to biographies on prominent African Americans, *Biography Resource Center: African Americans* gives researchers a comprehensive set of in-depth narrative biographies providing overviews of the subjects' lives and accomplishments, and thousands of thumbnail biographies. Covered are contemporary and historic figures such as Harriet

## is providing Montana libraries access to:



Tubman, Tiger Woods, Rosa Parks, Usher, and Condoleezza Rice. Magazine articles bring coverage of the African Americans up-to-date, and "Recent Update" windows display summaries of recent news events associated with particularly active individuals. Approximately 250 vetted Web links point to additional information. With an interface similar to that of Biography Resource Center, biographies in this product can be searched using Name, Biographical Facts, and Advanced Search paths.

During Black History Month and year round, *Biography Resource Center: African Americans* is a valuable resource for biographical information on African Americans in a wide range of disciplines, including literature, science, business, multicultural studies, government, sports, entertainment, the arts, and current events. ☺

# The Passionate Librarian

*by Jim Heckel, Director, Great Falls Public Library*

If ever there was any doubt about the critical importance of engaged librarianship, look to the events of the years since that infamous Watershed of 9/11.

During and since that time of heightened security concerns, two foundations of our democratic process, the First and Fourth Amendments, have come under immense pressure, and librarians have found themselves in the forefront of the fight to preserve traditional Constitutional rights.

It is, of course, the First Amendment and the freedom of speech clause and its implied access to information to make free speech possible we turn to for the moral and legal authority to fuel our passion for facilitating access to information. The Fourth Amendment protects against unreasonable searches, interpreted to mean library records and reading habits.

Under the U.S. Patriot Act, passed in a fever immediately after the events of 9/11, librarians were directly affected by Section 215. Section 215 allows the secret attachment of certain records, including business, medical and library records, without traditional review by the courts, negating the time-proven methodology of checks and balances. Librarians have been most vocal about this loss because we have become protective of the right to read as an essential basis for a healthy democracy.

In this battle, librarians are pitted against the government administration, the FBI and NSA (National Security Agency) and even covert and unnamed agencies. In this David and Goliath contest, only passion and a deep commitment to democratic ideals and a shared vision of our mandate can see us through.

With the overwhelming advent of the Internet, librarians have fought to provide unencumbered, unfiltered access to this invaluable and democratic information source. The long, and repeated battles to keep various reincarnations of the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and Child Online Protection Act (COPA) laws off the books have given further evidence to this commitment. And before that, librarians have long challenged censorship attempts on a variety of fronts.

If the vision of our democratic society includes the Jeffersonian ideal of an informed citizenship making critical decisions, then libraries and librarians remain essential because we have become neutral gateways for information access. We have, in this context, a noble calling. Noble callings demand passionate people.

This passion shows itself in a passion for children, for serving the scholar and idle reader alike, for getting the right cataloging, for keeping technologically alert and for creating spaces in the American democracy allee of the buffeting winds of politics and agenda-making that plague nearly all other access points to information.

Whenever I'm asked what I do for a living, I'm always tempted to respond that I am a PC, a Protector of the Constitution, an unmasked marvel who keeps watch on all the unprotected citizens of our nation. But I don't admit to this. I also don't reveal that it's tremendous fun to have a job that feeds a passion as well as a family. Instead, I admit to being director of a public library and that our mission is to build the type of community that I would like to live in, and that that community then becomes a part of a nation, and a world, in which I would like to grow old. ☺

## The Essence of Librarianship

*by Cheryl Hesel, Director, Rosebud County Library*

I didn't officially become a librarian until 1993, when I was definitely into middle age, but I fell in love with libraries and with the roles of librarians when I was about seven years old. I can still picture myself in the "reading nook" in the old Parmly Billings Library, a gothic Carnegie building that now serves as Billings' Western Heritage Center. More important than the reading nook was a wonderful elderly librarian, who understood a young girl who loved "boy" books with plenty of adventure and who then introduced me to some of the authors and books that filled my childhood.

I mention this background only because when I reflect on the job of that librarian, she dealt with acquisitions and cataloging, typing and filing of cards in the shelf list and in the card catalog, circulation, and answering the telephone. But most of all, she dealt with people and

their needs, all the way from toddlers needing beginning books to be read by parents, to me and my growing need for books and challenges, to teens wanting a whole different area of books, to adults doing research or looking for entertainment.

It was the people and their needs, the "public relations" aspect that she handled so well, that made me have such respect and affection for her that it affected my attitude toward books and libraries from that point on until now, when I am her.

Of course, I am her with a difference, for I am now dealing in a small public library with a multi-faceted job that includes overseeing and troubleshooting a public computer area, learning the new system for the

***continued on page 5 -- Essence***

# Why Be A Montana Librarian?

by Lisa Mecklenberg Jackson, Legislative Librarian of Montana and Chair of the Montana Library Association Marketing and PR committee

Being a librarian is cool. Being a librarian in Montana is WAY cool. Why, you may ask? Well, let me describe the ways...

**Maybe because there's no better place to live than Montana.** Great people, lots of stuff for both the indoor and outdoor-inclined to do, a low crime rate, wonderful communities, and some of the most spectacular scenery in the nation just outside your library door. You won't be working all the time, so it's smart to pick a place that makes your heart happy.

**Organization.** Both at the personal and professional level. Personally, I may be biased, but I think Montana librarians are some of the most organized librarians I've ever seen. That is because Montana librarians are expected to wear many hats and be as self-sufficient as possible due to the "ruralness" of some of our libraries. We've learned to figure it out. And if we can't figure it out, we punt. Resourcefulness is the Montana librarian's middle name. Professionally, most librarians in the state belong to the Montana Library Association, which is an invaluable and energetic organization benefiting libraries of all types in the state. Both experienced and new librarians are encouraged to jump right into the association, offer your services and, in turn, see what MLA can do for you.

**Nothing is ever the same on any given day.** And that's a good thing. Librarians in Montana may go from making a bulletin board, to searching a database for a legislator, to teaching an Internet class to senior citizens, to preparing a presentation for the library board of trustees – all in a single afternoon. Montana librarians hit the ground running; if the new books don't excite you, the new technologies will.

**Those Montana librarians.** Montana librarians are a cohesive lot and truly help each other out. Whether it's responding to questions from our listserv, sharing resources through ILL, teaching each other shortcuts for

using the statewide shared catalog, or congratulating each other on a job well done, you can count on Montana librarians to back each other 100%.

**And Montana librarians hold great conferences!** It could be the annual library association conference in the spring, the Academic and Special Libraries/Public Libraries Divisions fall gathering at a natural hot springs (yes, I did say hot springs), the OFFLINE retreat chock-full of technological tidbits, or one of the many other Montana library annual get-togethers, Montana librarians really know how to have fun. Networking, chocolate, learning, chocolate, laughs, chocolate...it's all there when Montana librarians come together. We have so much fun! (Example: Have you ever seen a librarian roller skate while flying a kite, INDOORS? Well, it happened at conference last year. And we haven't been the same since...).

**Natural leaders.** Librarians in Montana are independent cusses and don't like to be told what to do. Whether it's championing the cause of intellectual freedom, handling an unruly patron, or leading a national committee, you can always count on Montana librarians to be in the forefront on library-related issues. No shrinking violets are we. The Big Sky Book Babes and Brutes say "bring it on!"

**A real sense of community.** Because Montana is both sparsely populated and covers a large spatial area, librarians here have really connected and formed a sort of a "book bond," if you will. When we have statewide library meetings and conferences, I am just so delighted to see all my colleagues and cohorts. I laugh and laugh because I have so much fun and am continually impressed with the depth of knowledge and goodness contained in Montana librarians. It's a joyful thing. And you can't fake that.

A Montana librarian? Everyone should be so lucky.☺

---

## ***Essence -- continued from page 4***

Montana Shared Catalog, and dealing with a growing number of formats and changes in the way patrons want their information – in addition to the acquisitions, cataloging, and circulation that will always be with us.

The demands on my time as a librarian often center on technology, training, materials selection, policy making, and continual changes in planning and implementing. These aspects of librarianship are going to stay with us – and perhaps get more complicated – as we move at such a swift pace into each new stage of technology.

However, I remind myself frequently that I didn't fall in love with libraries because someone was troubleshooting computers, making policies, or dealing

with changes in plans and implementation of new equipment or formats. My love of libraries came because someone took the time to find out my needs and to meet them in a concerned and caring way.

Librarianship in the 21st century will continue to be challenging and at times overwhelming; but it must always remain patron and community centered, bolstered up by a true compassionate enjoyment of people and of the services we can offer them. And there are still young kids out there who need someone to guide them to a "good read" and show them that libraries are places where they are welcome, helped, and honored as equals with all others who walk in the door. Who knows? One of them may be the potential librarian who will continue our profession into the future.☺

# Words of Advice from a Current PEEL Scholar

Answers by Judy Brown McKenna, School Librarian, Bozeman Public Schools  
Attending Texas Woman's University, Denton TX -- Master of Library Science Candidate -- Class of 2006

## Q: Why should you get a professional library degree?

A: A professional library degree will raise your awareness of scholars in the library world such as Richard E. Rubin, Michael Gorman, G. Edward Evans, G. G. Chowdhury, Arlene G. Taylor, and *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The scholars and the manual will become your new best friends. They will help teach you everything you wanted to know about collection development, cataloging, the library profession, information storage and retrieval, and technical services. You can dazzle your co-workers with your knowledge of XML and authority control, or you may want to discuss the finer details of metadata. The conspectus model of Collection Development will be a sure hit at staff meetings. Don't forget to throw in a plug for that new collection development policy you wrote. You will be a highly sought after commodity because you will become one of the unique cadre of professionals who knows how to navigate databases and the Internet with the utmost confidence and flair. Your professional library degree will allow you to be on the cutting edge of new advances in this wonderful and generous profession. Your work as a professional librarian will enable you to make a difference in someone's intellectual life, and you will be contributing to the advancement of a noble profession.

## Q: What is distance learning like? What kinds of classes do you take? What are you learning?

A: Distance learning is like classroom learning except that you write everything and you usually have no idea what your professors and colleagues look like. There are several positive aspects to written communication (i.e., communication is more precise because you have the ability to edit your thoughts. You can think before you speak. You aren't distracted by whether you have spinach between your teeth when you are meeting with your professor or colleagues). I am working toward becoming a school library media specialist so I took the core classes of Information Professions, Information Storage and Retrieval, and Technical Services. In addition, I took Collection Development, Cataloging and Classification, the School Library Media Center, Multimedia, Literature for Children and Young Adults, a Book Review class, Librarians as Instructional Partners, and one elective that is yet to be determined. I may take a Reference Class, a

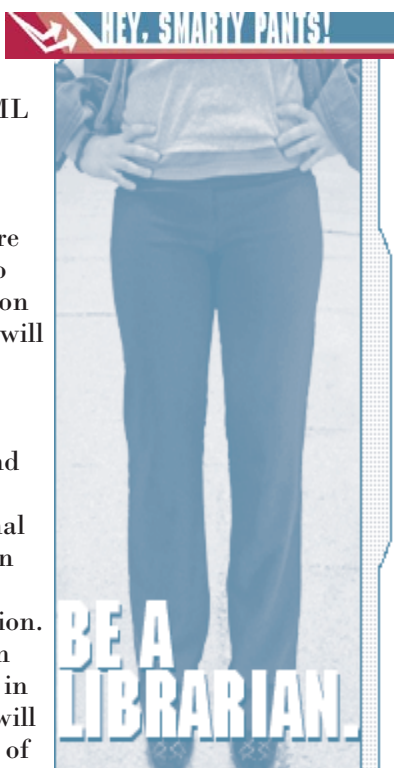
Public Library class, another cataloging class, or another literature class. I am learning how to be an information professional. People at work rely on me to help them solve their information needs. I teach students how to search for information so they can turn it into knowledge. I am also learning the language that will help me contribute to the advancement of our profession.

## Q: How has the PEEL scholarship and attending school changed your perspective at your job?

A: The PEEL scholarship and attending graduate school have changed my perspective at my job by helping me feel more confident and positive about the contribution I have to make in my job and community. Every aspect of my job is fun, from circulation to book repair to collection development and administration, because I can see the whole picture and I can see how my work contributes to the school, its library, and my community.

## Q: What opportunities has/will receiving the scholarship create?

A: I had the opportunity to attend the 2005 ALA annual conference in Chicago because of the PEEL scholarship. My university sponsored an essay contest with the prize being the right to work for 20 hours as a student-to-staff volunteer at the ALA annual conference. I decided to enter so I could at least try to attend the conference. I thought it would enhance the educational experience I was already receiving because of the PEEL scholarship. I won the essay contest. My university bought my plane ticket, and the ALA paid for my hotel room, meals, and conference registration. I worked for 20 hours at the conference for the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS). It was an incredible experience. I worked with the ALCTS Executive Director and staff, met representatives from the Library of Congress, saw the ALA President-elect, Michael Gorman, the outgoing President, Carol A. Brey-Casiano, U. S. Senator Barack Obama, attended the 2005 Newbery/Caldecott awards banquet, met all the recipients of the 2005 Newbery/Caldecott awards, and met several children's book authors. I also attended some informative sessions regarding school library media centers and the research being done to show how the centers enhance student achievement. I hope that the PEEL scholarship will continue to help open doors for my library career that will allow me to be an effective and enthusiastic professional librarian. ♡



# Getting the Most Out of Your MLIS Experience

*by Kate Zoellner, Reference Librarian/Assistant Professor, Mansfield Library, The University of Montana, Missoula*

## **You need a Master's degree to be a Librarian?**

While I was enrolled in the School of Information, friends and family would hesitantly ask me what I was studying. Bright minds wondered if I studied the Dewey Decimal (Classification) System, which is what most people automatically thought I might be studying. While stereotypes of librarians persist (leading to an enigmatic understanding of the profession), our roles and responsibilities are continuously changing. Graduate program curricula for ALA-accredited MLS programs continue to evolve in alignment with changes in the profession. I hope to provide a brief glimpse into my recent graduate school studies and experience in order to give prospective librarians an idea of not only what to expect if they decide to take the leap and go back to school but also tips on how to make the most of that time.

## **ALA-Accredited Programs**

The first phenomenon you will encounter when applying to graduate school is the varying titles of academic departments and schools offering ALA-accredited MLS degrees. These titles reflect the charges of departments and the curricular focus of today's MLS programs: titles range from the traditional (Department of Library Science) to the iSchool movement (interdisciplinary convergence of people, information, and technology) Information School, and various points in between (School of Library and Information Studies). Within each school, students select a program to follow based on their career goals or interests. For example, at my alma mater (University of Michigan), graduate students choose between a Master of Science in Information degree with a focus on Archives and Records Management; Human-Computer Interaction; Information Economics, Management and Policy; Library and Information Services (School Media track within LIS); or self-design their own program. I selected the Library and Information Services specialization because I wanted to work in an academic or public library.

Other schools, like the nearby University of Washington's Information School, offer different choices such as a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) (School Media Endorsement within MLIS), Law MLIS, or a Master of Science in Information Management degree. While there are a range of department and degree titles, the content of the curriculum combined with the instruction you receive and what you put into your studies determine your learning outcomes. Schools offer a great deal of program and instructor information online at their Web sites including credit requirements, course descriptions (often

including learning outcomes and the types of assignments and projects), and instructors' bios and research interests. These resources provide a sense of the program and information to determine whether it meets your needs. Additionally, admissions staff, faculty, and current and former students are great contacts for more granular questions.

## **Course Work**

Courses required for my MSI included Use of Information, Choice and Learning, Search and Retrieval, and Social Systems and Collections, as well as Organization of Information Resources, Information Resources and Services, Online Searching and Databases, and Professional Practice in Libraries and Information Centers. These courses covered information use, behavior, and design; problem-solving through the lenses of cognitive psychology and economic theory; search and retrieval as continuous computer- and person-mediated processes; and how collections are created, used, and how they develop meaning. Using class discussions, lectures, and individual and group projects and presentations, my courses also explored how various material formats are organized through subject assignment and cataloging, reference resources and reference interview techniques, the ability to break down a reference query into key searchable concepts and controlled vocabulary, and topics of concern to the profession (e.g., assessment, information literacy, leadership, scholarly communication).

## **Practical Experience**

The curriculum emphasized the conceptual foundation of information work and sought to balance theory with practical application through required group projects and practical engagement experiences (internships). Group projects were the rage in my graduate school experience! These projects seemed all-consuming at the time, but in retrospect taught me how to work and negotiate with people who have different expertise, learning styles, and class expectations. The required internships provided low-risk opportunities to apply knowledge from the classroom to impact library and information services. These hands-on work experiences enable students to explore work environments in different types of libraries and to gain valuable work-related experience.

## **Time**

I felt constantly busy in grad school. There was always more reading to get done, a presentation or meeting to attend, and my jobs. The need to balance coursework with work and personal responsibilities was ever-present. Yet, for myself, the decision to pursue an MLS and attend graduate school was fueled by strong goals and a vision of

*continued on page 8 -- Getting the Most*

## Getting the Most -- continued from page 7

the librarian I sought to become. I was glad to be busy moving forward on my career path.

### Leadership Opportunities

Student organizations at the school and university level are a great way to get to know your classmates, administration, and to practice leading a group. For example, most schools have student chapters of the American Library Association and Special Libraries Association. Volunteer to serve as an officer, and you gain leadership experience AND get connected with professional associations. Whether or not you have the time to participate in student organizations, you should definitely take advantage of professional association memberships, especially while there is much to gain and little risk involved - you have the student rate!

### Resource Surplus

Most Universities have a wealth of resources to support you in your studies. Take advantage of the resources you are paying for. For example, attend the workshops offered by your school or University's Career Center and utilize resume-review or mock-interview services. Look to an internship office, professors' contacts, alumni or

University employers as possible resources for landing your ideal internship or work experience. You should also attend professor's office hours and - this should go without saying - use the library.

### Take the Leap

Librarianship is an exciting and changing profession, full of variation and growth potential. The following guidelines and article may be helpful in guiding your decision to pursue your MLS.

American Library Association, Office for Accreditation (2005). Guidelines for Choosing a Master's Program in Library and Information Studies, In 2005-2006 Directory of Institutions Offering ALA-Accredited Master's Programs in Library and Information Studies. Chicago, 2005. Retrieved January 3, 2006, from the American Library Association Website:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/accreditation/lisdirb/lisdirectory.htm#Guidelines>

Manion, K. (May 2005). Taking Charge of Your Career. Information Outlook, 9, 17-18.

Wallace, L. K. (March 2002). Places an MLS Can Take You: Alternative Careers for Librarians. American Libraries, 33, 44-48. Retrieved January 3, 2006, from <http://www.ala.org/ala/hrdr/careersinlibraries/careerslibraries.htm> ☺

State Librarian's Office:  
Darlene Staffeldt, State Librarian  
Kris Schmitz, Central Services Manager  
Library Development:  
Bob Cooper, Suzanne Reymier, Maggie Meredith,  
Stetwide Technology Librarians  
Sue Jackson, Continuing Education Consultant  
Montana Library Network (MLN):  
Bruce Newell, Montana Library Network Manager  
Sarah McHugh, Montana Shared Catalog Director  
Montana Talking Book Library (MTBL):  
Christie Briggs, Supervisor  
Montana State Digital Library (MSDL):  
Jim Hill, Administrator  
Tori Orr, Library Services Manager  
Sibyl Bovan, NRS Projects Manager  
Montana State Library Commission:  
Ron Moody, Chair  
Nora Smith  
Caroline Bitz  
Linda McCulloch, Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Cheri Bergeron, Alternate for Supt. of Public Instruction  
Address: 1515 East Sixth Avenue — PO Box 201800  
Helena MT 59620-1800  
Phone: 406-444-3115 — Fax: 406-444-0266  
Toll Free in Montana: 800-338-5087 — TDD: 406-444-3005  
E-Mail: [msl@mt.gov](mailto:msl@mt.gov)  
The Montana State Library does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability in employment or the provision of services.  
Big Sky Libraries is a quarterly publication of the Montana State Library  
Sara Groves, Editor  
This publication is available in alternative formats upon request.  
990 copies of this newsletter were published at an estimated cost of \$389.80, \$221.95 for printing and \$167.85 for distribution.

